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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1489
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 7326
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 8537
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ DEC LIMA 4599
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA 9843
RUEHQD/AMEMBASSY QUITO 5257
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 3819
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHOND/DIRONDCP WASHDC
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 011398

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [KJUS](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY PROMPTS SPECULATION ABOUT HIGH-PROFILE ASSASSINATIONS

REF: BOGOTA 11005

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood.

Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) There is widespread concern among Colombia's political elite about the possibility of violence directed against one or more political figures related to the ongoing para-political scandal. Less clear is whether the concerns are based on solid information or speculation. Polo Democratic leader Senator Gustavo Petro told *El Tiempo* on December 17 he feared for President Uribe's safety. The security detail chief in the presidential palace told us they are taking the threats seriously. End summary.

Rumors Growing

¶2. (C) Colombian politicians from across the political spectrum have expressed concern to us that former paramilitaries may conduct a high-profile assassination ("megacidio") to stem growing political pressure to punish them for their crimes. General Oscar Naranjo, Director of the Colombian National Police Counterterrorism Directorate (DIJIN), told us on November 30 that presidential advisors Fabio Valencia and Bernardo Moreno were worried that paramilitaries feeling threatened might murder a leading public figure such as Liberal Senator Piedad Cordoba, Polo Senator Gustavo Petro, or a conservative political leader. Their concern was based on previous political crises where the goal of such attacks was to intimidate critics.

¶3. (C) Senator Roberto Gerlein, a Conservative Party leader, told us on December 6 that an unnamed "senior cabinet minister" had said to him he was worried about the increasing possibility of an assassination against a senior political figure that would "shake the country." The minister did not say who would conduct the attack or who might be a possible target. Gerlein added that Senator Miguel de la Espriella of the U Party, who recently revealed information about a secret

meeting between a group of 40 politicians and the ex-paramilitaries in 2001, had publicly announced a threat against himself as well.

¶4. (C) Other sources say the "megacidio" could come from rogue members of the security services to prevent their names from being tied to paramilitaries. Polo Senator Petro told us on December 7 he was worried about the possibility of a "megacidio," which could target any high-profile political leader, including himself or President Uribe. He claimed the likely culprits would be members of the police or military who were at risk of having their ties to paramilitaries exposed. In an El Tiempo interview on December 17, Petro said he feared for Uribe's safety based on information from sources he refused to identify. He pointed to unnamed politicians, businessmen, and military and police officers as prospective plotters and said he had warned DAS Director Andres Penate of the danger.

Presidential Palace Takes Threats Seriously

¶5. (C) It is unclear to what extent the concerns about a high-profile political murder reflect facts or speculation, but the security detail chief in the presidential palace told us they are taking the threats against Uribe seriously. They know Uribe's decision to transfer ex-paramilitaries to a maximum-security prison on December 1 has sparked resentment among the former paramilitary leaders and their supporters (ref A). Security officials are following up on Petro's claims and are taking additional security measures.

Comment

¶6. (C) We are also taking the rumors seriously, both as a security issue and a political issue.

WOOD

=====CABLE ENDS=====